



TAIZÉ IN KOLKATA

“Globalizing the Eagerness to Show Love”

To prepare the pilgrimage to Kolkata (Calcutta) we will listen to four young Indians and a bishop, all of whom have spent time in Taizé in recent years.

Rajan

– What will participants find when they come to Kolkata? How is the city changing?

The first thing that those coming from outside India will be struck by is the large number of brightly dressed people who live in the Kolkata metropolitan area, who seem to all be busily moving about struggling to earn a living. Such large numbers of people strain the infrastructure and thus public transport is crowded and there are often traffic jams. The weather at that time of year will still be hot and humid, making travel uncomfortable at times. The participants in the Pilgrimage of Trust will come to Kolkata right after the most important festival of the Bengali Calendar, Durga Puja, which ends this year on the 2nd of October. They will still find the remains of the elaborately decorated

“Puja Pandals” (tabernacles) which house the deity Durga whose image has been removed and immersed in the River Ganges (actually the tributary of the main river). Apart from these temporary structures there are many shrines, temples, mosques and churches of various Christian denominations throughout the older parts of the city. They will also find a vibrant democracy where protests and rallies are common and the walls are perpetually covered with graffiti of a political nature, most of it from the various Communist parties which have ruled the state of West Bengal since 1977. In the midst of the old Kolkata there are many signs of the new. Urban India is in the midst of something of an economic boom with new shops, hotels, schools, housing, factories springing up everywhere, and there are signs of this in Kolkata too.

– What role do Christians play in the life of the city?

Participants of the Pilgrimage of Trust will also find that Kolkata is a city where the Christian faith has a special place mainly because of the work of many inspired people. The contribution of the Christian community towards making the lives of ordinary people of Calcutta better is much appreciated and the participants will find a friendly welcome from the city at large.

Abenla

– What importance could the meeting in Kolkata have for young Indians?

India is a multi-religious and multi-ethnic country, and exposure to a foreign culture and viewpoint is always welcome. For the young people it will be a time to get spiritual nourishment and re-awakening from the people who attend, so that each one can be an agent to spread the gospel in creating hope and helping them to put their trust in

God. It will also empower the youth by calling them to serve God by serving others.

At present the economic situation of the country is changing from being an under-developed to a developed country. The effects of globalization, especially the free market, Western influence and modern lifestyle are alluring Indian youth towards a pub, club and gadgets culture. In spite of this progress, there are still people who are neglected and are not part of the mainstream; this cre-

ates terrorism, militarism, poverty, unemployment etc. India as a country follows the secular principles including freedom of religion, but in different pockets of Indian states people still follow the fundamentalist and communal principles that create communal and religious disharmony.

Ashrita

– What strikes the most the young Indians who come to Taizé?

Prayer! The most important aspect of Taizé prayer is silence which I think our youth are falling short of. One week in Kolkata will help young people to reflect on themselves in silence. Very rarely do we find silent prayer in India and that is one reason why young Indians are unable to understand the true and deep spirituality which exists in them. The prayer in Kolkata will help them to reveal this spirituality to the whole world. The chants will add to the



IN TAIZÉ:

Two New Workshops on Art

Admiration, indifference, fear... Artists look at the natural world. And how do we see it?

From the beginnings of humanity, artists have explored the mysterious relationship that we have with nature. In this workshop, we will try to examine the way we look at the world.

Four works are taken into consideration. Among the earliest works of art, painted and sculpted images on the walls of the prehistoric caves in Roucadour show flocks of animals and, here and there, human hands laid flat on the wall and outlined onto the rock. Thousands of years later, about the year 200 AD, in Egypt, a delicate blue tapestry with coloured fish witnesses to the astonishing human capacity to observe nature: each fish is carefully painted, similar to the others while being different at the same time. Still later, in the nineteenth century, the German painter Caspar David Friedrich expresses with his brush the tragic fate of a naval expedition to the North Pole, the hulk of the boat crushed by huge icebergs and trapped in the middle of the arctic cold. Even closer to us today, the work of the photographer Raymond Sauvaire draws the spectator into a nature which is full of harmony through serene and peopled landscapes.

How do these artists help us better to perceive the place and the responsibility that we have in the midst of the world today?

Everyday beauty

A second workshop is called "Everyday Beauty". Today, blockbuster exhibitions have more and more success, with people queuing for hours to see the work of past masters. We have somehow understood that beauty, more than just a luxury, is something which can feed us and help us to discover meaning in a world which so often seems to have none. As the ancient philosophers taught us, beauty is in many ways the visible expression of goodness and truth. This workshop tries to explore how we can stay attuned to beauty in our everyday lives, in our apartments, streets, and places of work or study. After all, our eyes see the same things that artists see: landscapes, cityscapes, portraits and human figures. With observation, sketch pad or camera, can we too discover unexpected beauty in unlikely places?

atmosphere of serenity, something which Indian youth are hungry for.

- As far as you can see, what characterizes India most strongly at present? What are the most important questions that young Indians have?

For the last few years India's pluralistic, cultural and religious diversity has been under serious threat due to political, fanatical fundamentalism on the one hand and the impact of Western culture on the other. In this critical period, the Church in India has to evolve a new and daring approach to the cultural issues of this country and discover ways of facing and transforming them.

Poverty and unemployment are the greatest hurdles for our Indian youth. Around 50% of the youth fall under these categories. This social and economic issue is preventing them from spiritual practices. I think the most important questions that young Indians have are: Where and how far will religious faith lead them today? When and how are they going to experience a deep satisfaction? Who and what will bring them out of their depressed and insecure situation? Where is faith going to lead us?

A new nation of trust, peace and hope can be built up only by recognizing one's faith, and the recognition of faith is possible only through deepening oneself to recognize the God within each one of us. We will come to Kolkata to experience and inculcate this process of deepening one's faith through silence and chants.

Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil

- What could this sharing across regional (continental) boundaries bring to the participants? In what way is it important today?

The young people who will come to Kolkata next October will understand that as the commercial interests of communities globalize, eagerness to show love, concern and solidarity also can assume global dimensions. They will begin to dream of new possibilities in their daily life of sharing more generously of the gift they have received from God.

Complete article: www.taize.fr/en; Meeting in Kolkata

Pilgrimage of Trust to Kolkata (Calcutta), October 5-9, 2006

How to prepare for the meeting

To participate in the meeting in Kolkata means taking a step forward spiritually, by finding simple ways to grow in faith and in our commitments. While preparing to go to Kolkata, we can:

1. Pray with our local community or a regular prayer group. This will help make our trip a spiritual journey, connected with the life of our parish, group, or chaplaincy.

2. Reflect with others on the *Unfinished Letter* by Brother Roger, and in particular on the following themes: growing in intimacy with God, looking at our world with hope, the Church as a place of communion for all.

3. Enter gradually into the Indian culture: go to meet Indians who live near you, look for information about Bengali culture and the history of the Indian Church on the internet...

A one-week preparation program in Taizé

All those from Europe who wish to go to Kolkata are asked to spend one week in Taizé anytime between April 9 and August 27. During the week in Taizé, special meetings will be organized in order to familiarise ourselves with various aspects of the journey and program, and to prepare ourselves for encountering a city and a culture different from our own.

If, because of work or other impor-
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Summer 2006: New Topics for Reflection

During the Easter weeks, over 11,000 people visited the hill in successive stages. They discovered the new topics for 2006:

"Unfinished Letter."

Reflection and sharing based on the last letter of Brother Roger. How can we rise to the challenge of peace in today's world? What can we do to make God's love for all more perceptible?

"God comes to us."

In the midst of the demands and challenges of everyday life, how does God come to us? How does the life of Jesus told in the Gospel become "good news" for us?

"Jacob."

A reflection about someone who wrestled with God and with human beings, who was blessed by God and reconciled with his brother. Bring a Bible.

A week in silence and prayer.

Participation in the community prayers, with accommodation and meals in an area set aside for those who want complete silence. Daily Bible reflection led by a brother or sister. The rest of the day is spent alone in silence, with the opportunity to speak individually with a brother or sister. You can also spend two days in silence, from Friday to Sunday.

Some weeks, there is a special Bible reflection for young adults between 25 and 35.

Easter in Taizé:
life-commitment
of the first
Hungarian
brother in the
community



tant commitments, you are unable to come to Taizé between these dates, please contact us.

All those from Africa, North America and Oceania are asked to write to Taizé in order to be put into contact, where possible, with others preparing for the meeting.

Practical information

- Dates: Arrival, welcome and first prayer on October 5th, final prayer on the evening of October 8th, departure on October 9th.
- Place: Don Bosco School, Park Circus, Kolkata.
- Participants are from 20 to 35 years of age. It is important to be able to speak English.
- Theme: "On the road of trust... towards a future of peace."
- Program: Morning prayer in the local parishes and institutions, followed by a morning program organised locally. At the end of the morning, all travel to Don Bosco School for midday prayer, followed by group reflection and workshops, and then evening prayer.
- Accommodation will be in host families.
- Meals will be simple, breakfast in the places of accommodation, and lunch and dinner distributed on the Don Bosco School grounds after midday and evening prayers.
- Contribution to costs: Amount according to country of origin, to be given in Indian rupees at the welcome in Kolkata. See the website for more information. What you give covers meals, accommodation and other expenses of the meeting, and also supports other young people with fewer means who wish to participate.
- A pre-meeting program in India: During the week before the meeting, you can discover the life of a local community in the West Bengal region of India and be welcomed by young people there. Please contact Taizé for further details.

How to register for the Kolkata meeting

As soon as you think you will be participating in the Kolkata meeting, please inform us by filling out the pre-registration form. Your final registration, when you confirm your participation with all the details of your journey, must be sent in by August 31.

Registration and further information:

Meetings, Taizé Community,
71250 Taizé, France

Tel. (33) 385 50 30 02

Email: meetings@taize.fr

www.taize.fr; Meeting in Kolkata

BIBLE MEDITATIONS

In contemporary society where "self-realization" is encouraged and glorified, Jesus' teaching of "self-denial" is a real challenge. Some may ask: Is denying oneself not losing oneself? What remains if one denies oneself? Is taking up the cross really necessary? Are there no other effective ways of being disciples of Jesus? But Jesus' words are so clear. He warns sharply against the danger of losing what is most precious for immediate gain. Should we not understand the perplexing word "to deny oneself" as meaning to give the priority to God's will and plan instead of our own?

This teaching of Jesus follows Peter's declaration in Caesarea Philippi. Jesus admires Peter's faith and rewards him with the promise of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Paradoxically, however, from that time on he begins to announce his passion. When Peter opposes it, he scolds him harshly for setting his mind "not on divine things but on human things" (16:23). For Christ there is a divine imperative one must obey, even though one may not fully understand it. He lived it out till the very end and invites his disciples to do the same. That is what it means to lose one's life for his sake.

Far from being a form of blackmail, these words are a promise of life to everyone who has decided to follow Christ by giving their life in various forms in the Church. Those who forget themselves for the sake of Christ and Gospel in the service of others will receive a hundred times more! Freed from worry and fear for the future, they will be able to live the present moment more intensively with trust in God, knowing that their past is buried in Christ and that He will take care of their future. Finding a true meaning of their life in the service of God and neighbors, hence finding inner joy and peace—that is what it means to find life.

- What can help free me from worries and fears to be a follower of Jesus?
- When was I able to forget myself in the joyful service of others? What did I learn from that experience?
- In a world where the logic of competition and success prevails, how can we live better the challenge of Jesus' teaching?

August: Jeremiah 2: 1-13

These disconcerting words, in which God seems to be speaking angrily against his people, are in fact a sign of his profound concern for them.

Jeremiah brings God's message at a period of crisis. Its aim is to help them see where their real security lies, to realize that their true identity and their long-term well-being depend on their relationship with God.

The problem is that the people have tended to neglect this life-giving relationship or "covenant" in favour of other things, particularly the worship of "idols" or of "Baal". This was not simply a question of worshipping the one God under another name; it was quite a different approach to the divine. It identified God with the powerful forces of politics and of nature, especially the forces of fertility. A present-day equivalent might be giving ultimate importance to success. Such a spirituality may have provided a sense of security, but it would lead to people becoming dependent on these forces that are ultimately impersonal, inhuman. On the other hand, faith in the God who brought his people out from slavery in Egypt is a relationship based on what is most human: on love and on trust. It leads towards liberation from what is inhuman. And, moreover, it remains alive even "in the desert", where the natural forces of fertility fail.

So God calls to his people with the intensity of an abandoned lover, sad because in neglecting God, they have neglected what gives them life. Their alternative to God is like a cistern (v. 13), a kind of artificial cave carved out of the rock for storing vast quantities of rainwater: impressive by its size, but useless if the rock is cracked. God himself is like a spring: perhaps there doesn't seem to be so much water at any one time, but it is living water, not stagnant, and it keeps on flowing....

- Have I had any experiences in my life when God brought me out into freedom or "through the desert"?
- What for me is like a cistern – impressive, but in the end unreliable as something to live from?
- In what way is God like a "spring of water"? What does this imply for my life?

These Bible meditations are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Jesus our joy, you
call us to follow
you and we
understand that
your Gospel can
change both our
heart and our life.

2 SUN To a man who had been told that his daughter was dead, Jesus said: "Do not be afraid, only have faith." Later, taking the child by the hand he said to her, "Talitha kum!" which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about.

3 Mon St THOMAS In Christ, you are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by the Spirit.

4 Tue The Lord says to his people: Do not mistreat or oppress the strangers in your midst, for you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

5 Wed Paul writes: We announce what no eye has seen and no ear has heard, what the mind of man cannot visualize: all that God has prepared for those who love him.

6 Thu Paul writes: Persevere, standing firm on the solid base of faith, without drifting away from the hope held out by the Gospel.

7 Fri The Lord your God is a merciful God who will not forsake you.

8 Sat Christ has been raised from the dead as the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep. Just as all die in Adam, so in Christ all will be brought to life.

1 Sat The Lord says: I will give an undivided heart to my people. I will put a new spirit in them.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

9 SUN Jesus came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this?"

10 Mon With deep compassion I shall bring you back to me, says the Lord, your redeemer.

11 Tue David prayed saying: Everything comes from you, our God, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. We are guests before you and passing visitors on this earth.

12 Wed Though you are troubled by all kinds of trials, you are full of joy. For your faith, which is worth more than gold — that perishes even though it is refined by fire — will result in praise when Christ Jesus is revealed.

13 Thu Be mindful of prisoners as if you yourselves were in prison with them, and of those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were also suffering.

14 Fri We had all gone astray like sheep, everyone taking their own way, and the Lord has laid on his servant the faults of all of us. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.

15 Sat After the model of the Holy One who has called you, be holy yourselves in all that you do.

16 SUN Calling the twelve apostles to him, Jesus sent them out two by two. And they went preaching the need to change one's heart and they drove out many evil spirits.

17 Mon The peoples of the earth will say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, for him to teach us his ways and for us to walk in his paths.

18 Tue Paul writes: Let us stop judging one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any obstacle in the way of another.

19 Wed Be quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry, for human anger does not bring about God's justice.

20 Thu Since the Spirit is our life, let our actions be guided by the Spirit.

21 Fri Jesus said: I seek to do not my own will, but the will of the one who sent me.

22 Sat I will trust and not be afraid, for God is my strength and my song.

23 SUN When Jesus saw the large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them at length.

24 Mon Those who know your name trust in you, Lord. For you never forsake those who seek you.

25 Tue St JAMES Jesus said: The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life for the ransom of many.

26 Wed Jesus said: If you make my word your home, you will indeed be my disciples. You will come to know the truth and the truth will set you free.

27 Thu The Lord says: Do what is right and act with justice, for my salvation is close at hand and my deliverance will soon be revealed.

28 Fri At that time, Jesus went up into the hills to pray and he spent the whole night praying to God.

29 Sat Jesus said: The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that a man took and threw into his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.

30 SUN After the people saw Jesus feed the crowd, they began to say: "Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, realizing that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, withdrew to the hills again, alone.

31 Mon Isaiah said: When he laid his hand upon me, God told me, "Do not fear all that people fear. Do not be afraid. I am the one whom you are to regard as holy."

JULY

DAILY READINGS

God of
compassion, we
praise you for the
multitude of
women, men and
young people who,
all across the
earth, are striving
to be witnesses to
peace,
reconciliation and
communion.

1 Tue Peter asked Jesus, "How many times should I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "Not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

2 Wed Jesus said: I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark but will have the light of life.

3 Thu Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

4 Fri Jesus said: Whoever listens to my words and puts them into practice is like someone who built their house on rock.

5 Sat Jesus said: Do not judge, and you will not be judged.

6 SUN TRANSFIGURATION You do well to pay attention to the word of the prophets, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

7 Mon The Lord says: My people are so dear to me that, whenever I speak of them, I remember them lovingly. Therefore my heart yearns for them and has compassion on them.

8 Tue For Christ I have accepted the loss of all other things—I look on them as rubbish so that I may gain Christ and be found in him.

9 Wed Jesus said: Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant.

10 Thu My soul is thirsting for you, my God, your love is better than life itself.

11 Fri Jesus said: Whoever makes themselves humble like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. Anyone who welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me.

12 Sat Jesus said: Look, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves; so be as shrewd as snakes and yet innocent as doves.

13 SUN Jesus said: It is written in the prophets, "They will all be taught by God." Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him, comes to me.

14 Mon God created human beings for an everlasting life, he made them in the image of his own nature.

15 Tue THE VIRGIN MARY Elizabeth said to Mary: Blessed is she who believed that the promise the Lord made her would be fulfilled.

16 Wed The Lord says: It is time to seek me out. Sow with justice and reap the fruit of unfailing love.

17 Thu Let us love, since God loved us first. Anyone who does not love the brother or sister they see cannot love God whom they do not see.

18 Fri Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. Instead, repay with a blessing, for to this you were called.

19 Sat Jesus said: Do not let your hearts be troubled. You trust in God, trust also in me.

20 SUN Jesus said: Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

21 Mon The Lord says: I will take care of my flock. I shall look for the lost sheep, bring back the strays, bandage the injured and strengthen the sick. I shall watch over the one that is healthy and strong.

22 Tue Jesus went up into the hills by himself to pray. When evening came he was there, alone.

23 Wed Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. You have set me free from my distress.

24 Thu My soul longs for you in the night, Lord, and deep within me, my spirit seeks you.

25 Fri Jesus said: Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the Gospel will save it.

26 Sat Paul writes: I do not consider that I have already made it, but forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal.

27 SUN Seeing that many of his disciples were turning away, Jesus said to the Twelve, "What about you, do you want to go away too?" Peter answered, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life."

28 Mon Paul writes: Let us put aside the deeds of darkness. Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.

29 Tue The days are coming, says the Lord, when I shall send hunger upon the land; not hunger for food or thirst for water, but a hunger to hear the Word of God.

30 Wed Jesus said: You are the light of the world. Let your light shine in people's sight, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

31 Thu The One who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit living in you.

AUGUST

DAILY READINGS

Is everything that happens decided by God in advance?

What does freedom of choice mean for a believer?

For many people today, faith in an all-powerful and all-knowing God is hard to reconcile with true freedom of choice exercised by human beings. If God knows everything that will happen and has a plan for creation, what is the use of racking our brains to try and make authentic choices?

First of all, the notion of a divine "plan" does not mean that there is a kind of book in which everything is written down ahead of time. It simply expresses the truth that the existence of the universe and our own lives is not the result of mere chance, but that we exist for a reason. God created the world and human beings so that we can enter into a relationship with him; God wants to share his own life with us. As an age-old Christian hymn puts it: "In Christ, God chose us before the foundation of the world to be holy in his presence, in love" (Ephesians 1:4). All the events by which God manifests himself outwardly are commanded by a prior intention (prior not in time, but logically), namely, to give us the fullness of life in communion with him. That is his "plan," his "will," and it is nothing other than the expression of his love.

This loving will is expressed in the vast diversity of persons and situations. It manifests itself first of all in the gifts God grants to creatures. In the case of human beings, one of our greatest gifts is the ability to choose, to act freely. This gift is essential, for God wishes from us a response of love to his love. Forcing us or determining our choices would be in total contradiction with his designs; it would make love impossible.

The error of believing that everything is already predetermined comes from confusing God as he is in himself with created time. God is not subject to our time. God is neither "before" nor "after"; God is. In John's Gospel, Jesus says, "Before Abraham was, I Am" (John 8:58). The point of contact between God and us can only be the present moment. Someone even named God "the Eternal Now." God did not create the universe first and then go off into his "splendid isolation." On the contrary, by his Spirit God lives every instant of our life with us, encouraging us to lead it in harmony with his will of love. Far from being fixed in advance, God's plan is what we create in his company minute by minute, our whole life long, by trying to respond fully to the gift of his love by a life of solidarity and service of others.

Freedom can be looked at from many angles. Today, people usually emphasize freedom of choice: to be free means being able to decide by oneself what one wants to be or do. This outlook is so predominant that, for some people, God is even an enemy of the human race because he wishes to dictate our behavior. Faith as a result makes us less free.

To have an integral vision of freedom, two different levels must be distinguished. On the one hand, freedom requires choices which are not determined by external constraints. In creating human beings in his image, God gave them this ability to choose. In us, everything is not programmed ahead of time. In order to grow we have to take steps that no one else can take for us. And as has often been said, even not to choose is still a choice!

This ability to choose, good and necessary in itself, is not sufficient to attain true freedom, however. We must make choices in function of something; our decisions are oriented towards a final goal or purpose. To make us authentically free, that purpose can only be to become the person we truly are, to bring our identity to its full flowering.

It should thus be obvious that an understanding of freedom that would encourage us to do whatever we felt like is deficient even in human terms. There are choices that make us less ourselves. To take extreme examples, someone who "freely" decides to take drugs, or to commit suicide, cuts off the branch on which they are sitting and deprives themselves of the possibility of making future decisions that would lead to greater happiness.

"Lord, you search me and you know me," sings the psalmist (Psalm 139:1). If the creator of the human heart is the one who knows it best of all (see Jeremiah 17:9-10), then with his help we will be able to make the choices that lead us to our true identity and thus to true happiness. God helps us first of all by his Word, which indicates the right way to act, and which culminates in the life of his Son, Jesus Christ. God helps us likewise by the inner presence of his Spirit, the fruit of Christ's death and resurrection. By trusting in God and trying to walk in his steps, we do not abdicate our freedom; we use our ability to make free choices in order to become truly ourselves in a relationship with the Source of our existence. We create a space for the full blossoming of human life in us and around us.

News of the Pilgrimage of Trust

A Visit to Norway and Finland

One of the brothers describes the week he spent in March in the far North of Europe:

In Oslo itself, among other meetings and prayers, one afternoon a "seminar" was held. Everyone came to the "Bymisjon", the city mission where those on the edges of society are welcomed—the homeless, immigrants, addicts. The afternoon began with a prayer in a chapel under the roof of the house. Then we all came downstairs for an introduction on Brother Roger's *Unfinished Letter*. Two workshops were offered after this: either learning the different parts of the songs or taking part in a Bible introduction on the song of Mary, the "Magnificat".

After supper and a time of preparation, we gathered with many others for a large prayer with the songs of Taizé in the cathedral. It was open to all, and the bishop took part as well. Those who wished could then attend a public discussion in the crypt between representatives of different Christian denominations. The topic was: "widening the roads to reconciliation".

There is a retreat center in the middle of the Norwegian forest, four hours north of Oslo by car. For several years now, a Taizé brother has led a yearly retreat weekend for young Norwegians there.

The first meeting in Finland took place in Laihia, a few kilometers east of Vaasa. Some people traveled more than 250 kilometers by car on snow- and ice-covered roads to take part in the meeting and in the prayer.

The last cities were Helsinki and Tampere. At Tampere, every two weeks there is a "Thomas Mass". For several years now these Masses have been organized in the whole country. They are often celebrated on Sunday evening, and are meant for those who are experiencing doubts in their faith journey and who would like to touch Jesus like the apostle Thomas did. At Tampere, many people are involved in preparing them, up to 50 or 60. Several hundred people were present at that Mass, and the church was full of joy and real fervor. At that moment, something of an age-old Christian tradition suddenly became visible in that land in the Far North of Europe.

Two Brothers in Algeria

Early in January, two of the brothers went to Algeria to meet the students from Sub-Saharan Africa who come to

Taizé, and to discover the tiny Christian community with which the students share their life-journey while they are living there. One of the brothers writes:

Our journey began in Algiers, and then we went to the western region before finally returning to Algiers. We were struck by so many very simple encounters, and by the joy of meeting old acquaintances.

One thing that strikes the visitor to Algeria is the Arab world's sense of hospitality. The visitor often hears words like, "You are welcome in our house." After the difficult years of terrorism, the presence of foreigners indicates a new beginning. However, many of these students seem disconcerted when they arrive in Algeria. Living far from home for several years, a large number will never be able to visit their countries while they are studying.

Faced with a different culture, sometimes they feel very vulnerable. And those among them who are Christian feel strongly the fact of being foreign. In this Islamic society, individual Christians and the Church as such remain very discreet; they are practically not represented in society, except for a few church buildings they were allowed to keep after independence.

On account of its vocation in the Islamic world, the Church in Algeria attempts to be present with respect and selflessness to the people around it. Wishing to witness to a God who is close to all human beings, the Christians attempt, with much imagination and daring, to create "platforms of meeting" allowing them to come into contact with a great variety of people. The goal is not to facilitate conversions, but first of all to express by their lives the realities of the Gospel.

There are very few permanent leaders in the Christian communities, and they are always concerned to be able to continue their presence within the "household of Islam" that is so important, giving the world a strong sign that it is possible to live together, even when apparently many things separate us. Their lives are composed of small steps, where any "results" have above all to find their place in a faithful, ongoing witness.

Portugal: Making These Experiences Last

In March 2006, one of the brothers led a series of meetings in Portugal. He spent ten days visiting groups and parishes in various parts of the country:

There were five meetings in the regions of Lisbon, bringing together over a thousand young people. Inspired by the intense experience of prayer in preparation for and during the European meeting held in Lisbon just over a year ago, a number of groups started to organize regular prayers in their parishes. It is not also easy to make these experiences

last, since the number of people taking part may not be stable, but the perseverance of a few makes it possible to offer these moments that are so important and much appreciated. In some parishes, prayers are held every week, in others every other week, or once a month. Each group tries to adapt the times of prayer to the needs of the local community. A group of pupils in one school decided to hold a weekly prayer using the songs from Taizé. Since the parish church is directly opposite the school, they take advantage of the lunch break to gather there for twenty minutes of prayer every Monday.

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Correspondence: Letter from Taizé, Taizé Community, 71250 Taizé, France
 e-mail: lettre@taize.fr www.taize.fr
 News from Taizé by email twice a month free of charge: www.taize.fr/taizenews.php
 Directeur de publication : A. Trochard, Edition et impression : Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 71250 Taizé, France, CPPAP n° 0110K79608 - DL 1026